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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0973

INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 2160

RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 9194

RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 7439

RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 5293

RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 3592

RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 5223

RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0091

RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM PRIORITY 0758

RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 4340

RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 9754

RUEHB1/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 7045

RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0079

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 3904

RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY

RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001139

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y - ADDED PASSING INSTRUCTIONS

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SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: ELECTIONS UPDATE NO. 1

REF: COLOMBO 539

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Classified By: AMBASSADOR PATRICIA A. BUTENIS. REASONS: 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (SBU) Introduction: As an air of anticipation builds in Sri Lanka in advance of the upcoming Sri Lankan elections, including a presidential election scheduled for January 26 and a parliamentary election anticipated for later in the spring, post will provide update reports as events dictate, with emphasis on the quick relay of breaking news. This is the first such update. Post will provide more in-depth analysis in separate cables.

FONSEKA, UNP DETAIL ELECTION ISSUES FOR AMBASSADOR

¶2. (C) At a December 14 lunch for Ambassador and DCM, to which General Fonseka also dropped in, host UNP deputy head Karu Jayasuriya said the UNP-JVP "alliance" was not a coalition, though all were for a return to democracy. Jayasuriya had a long list of complaints about media harassment by the government and Rajapaksa corruption and "family rule." As for the Tamils, the UNP leader said he believed they all wanted "regime change" because of the way they had been treated by the Rajapaksas. After Fonseka arrived, the former general discussed his interview in the Sunday Leader newspaper on December 13, in which he had accused Defense Secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa of ordering at the end of the war the shooting of any LTTE leaders who might try to surrender under flags of truce. (NOTE: These killings were detailed in the State Department Report to Congress on Incidents at the End of the War, and in RefTel, though details of the orders issued were not known to the report

authors. END NOTE.) Fonseka claimed he did not know until two days later about the flurry of phone calls between Gotabhaya, the Norwegian ambassador, and the LTTE leadership regarding surrender and said he had been told details by journalists. Nevertheless, he said he took full responsibility for the actions of the men in uniform.

¶13. (C) As for Fonseka's chances at the upcoming January 26 election, he and Jayasuriya believed they could win if the election were free and fair. They calculated that if voter turnout were over 80 percent, they would win. This was why, they claimed, the Rajapaksas were focused on keeping turnout low. Even in the southern districts, home to both President Rajapaksa and Fonseka, the election was up for grabs because of local dissatisfaction with Rajapaksa corruption and cronyism. Finally, on the question of the desired role of the international community in the elections, Jayasuriya made a strong pitch for IC involvement to help ensure a free and fair election and level playing field.

UNF CHALLENGES PRESIDENT TO DEBATE

¶14. (C) On December 13, the joint Opposition held a press conference which included Gen. Fonseka, JVP leader Somawansa Amarasinghe and UNP leader Ranil Wickremasinghe. Amarasinghe challenged President Rajapaksa to agree to a public debate with Gen. Fonseka, but there has not yet been any response from the Rajapaksa camp. At lunch with the Ambassador, Fonseka and Jayasuriya both said they did not expect Rajapaksa to agree to a debate, joking that it would be hard for him to speak without a teleprompter.

PILLAYAN WAVERING -- AGAIN

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¶15. (C) After a party meeting on December 11, the TMVP released a statement that appeared to back off earlier statements by its leader, Pillayan, that the TMVP would support President Rajapaksa. Observers have stated that Pillayan's December 2 pledge of support to the President angered many in his TMVP ranks, and that they forced him to retreat from that position.

TNA WISH LIST

¶16. (C) TNA MP Suresh Premachandran told media on December 12 that his party colleagues had agreed on four main points to demand of any candidate they pledge to support. The four demands reportedly included a full account of those reported disappeared or arrested during the war; to resettle all displaced persons; to withdraw from High Security Zones and enable resettlement of these lands; and to work out a political settlement. Premachandran said a delegation of TNA representatives had met with Senior Presidential Advisor Basil Rajapaksa on December 7 to discuss these conditions, and that TNA leader R. Sampanthan had presented the list to UNP Deputy Leader Karu Jayasuriya. In a meeting with PolOff on December 11, TNA MP Pathmini Sithamparanathan implied that there were still divisions within the TNA about what issues they would push in any negotiations, and doubts about how much they could expect to demand for their support.

RAJAPAKSA ORDERS POSTERS DOWN

¶17. (C) The President announced on December 14 that he had ordered the police to take down any campaign-related posters, including his own, as they all violated elections law. Colombo has been blanketed with pictures of the president and his brothers, including at least one enormous full profile picture of Rajapaksa that measures some 60 feet tall.

Fonseka posters just began appearing around town over the weekend of December 12-13, including one large billboard-sized poster on the road from the center of town to the parliament building. On a recent trip to Galle, EconOff sighted well over 1,300 Rajapaksa posters along the 100 km route. Not more than 20 Fonseka posters were seen on the same drive, and some of these had been either damaged or partially covered by Rajapaksa posters. The Southern Province is known as Rajapaksa's home turf. At Jayasuriya's lunch, he told the Ambassador that the Rajapaksa campaign had over 40,000 cut-outs of the President created, nearly half of which had been placed in greater Colombo.

BUTENIS